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First Committee

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Official Records

Chairman: Mr. De Alba

(Mexico)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda items 57 to 72 (continued)

Thematic discussion on item subjects and introduction and consideration of all draft resolutions submitted under all disarmament and international security items

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): This morning we will hear from delegations that have requested the opportunity to introduce draft resolutions on the clusters we have already taken up. Then we will continue, as indicated in document A/C.1/59/CRP.2, to the discussion of the cluster on conventional arms.

Ms. ElMarasy (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a pleasure for me to introduce draft resolution A/C.1/59/L.36, on "Prevention of an arms race in outer space". Egypt and Sri Lanka have for years had the honour of introducing this draft resolution in the First Committee. We wish to issue a warning against the arms race in outer space.

An unprecedented number of countries support this draft resolution this year. I am not going to read out the names of all, because the list is now quite long. However, the draft resolution demonstrates the majority will of all the peoples of the world. In several forums we have emphasized that outer space remains the common heritage of humankind. Therefore, space must not be allowed to become the subject of an arms race. We need to be careful to avoid any kind of arms race at this juncture, be it on Earth or in outer space.

In that context, those who have introduced this draft resolution call upon the members of this Committee to study and adopt it. As members have noted, the text refers, as in previous years, to several international agreements, including those concluded during the General Assembly's first special session on disarmament. The objective was to avoid an arms race in outer space. The draft resolution refers to complementary bilateral and multilateral efforts. We hope there will indeed be further transparency regarding all bilateral efforts here.

Those who are introducing the draft resolution highly appreciate what has been done by the Conference on Disarmament, which has played a very important role in negotiations on multilateral agreements. The draft calls on the Conference to work to achieve those objectives. We hope that during its 2005 session the Conference on Disarmament will be able to establish a special committee to avoid the arms race in outer space. Such a committee must have a clearly defined mandate. We fully appreciate the valuable contributions of China and of the Russian Federation in ensuring that the Conference on Disarmament deals with these issues.

There have been proposals to amend the text of the draft resolution or to strengthen it in accordance with the national priorities of some countries. We respect the preference to adopt a progressive and phased approach to achieve the objective, namely, preventing the arms race in outer space. We favour arriving at a compromise between and among all points

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of view. That is why we have developed a text that is similar to last year's and have amended it according to recent technical developments so it can receive total support and unanimity.

The draft resolution should, if possible, enjoy this Committee's full support. We hope that all members will be able to support it, thus reflecting the will of the international community with regard to this issue.

Mr. Vasiliev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation, together with the United States of America, is now submitting for consideration by the First Committee a draft resolution on bilateral strategic nuclear arms reductions and the new strategic framework (A/C.1/59/L.56).

On 22 November 2002, the General Assembly for the first time adopted a resolution on this item, resolution 57/68, by consensus. The previous two years had clearly reaffirmed the gradual development of a partnership relation between the Russian Federation and the United States and the establishment of a spirit of cooperation, and on that basis, the Presidents of Russia and the United States issued the joint declaration of 24 May 2002. The most significant indicator of the new level of strategic relations between the two countries is the fact that they no longer consider each other enemies or strategic threats. The declaration also reaffirms that our States are partners and are cooperating to advance stability, security and economic integration, so as to counteract together the global threats and challenges existing today and to promote solutions to regional conflicts.

The current nature of Russian-American relations is an important factor in international security, including consistent progress in the area of nuclear disarmament. The implementation of commitments in this area is playing a key role in the bilateral cooperation of the Russian Federation and the United States. The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, signed in Moscow in May 2002, entered into force on 1 June 2003. By that treaty the Russian Federation and the United States committed to reducing and limiting their strategic nuclear warheads, by 31 December 2012, to an aggregate quantity not exceeding 1,700 to 2,200 units for each party. In other words, this reduction is approximately three times greater than that established by the Start I Treaty.

This commitment represents a major step forward for nuclear disarmament and is of great significance for

the creation of a security system for the twenty-first century. The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty ensures that the process of disarmament and verification of arms and conditions continues when the APM Treaty is no longer in effect and other agreements on verification are also being called into question. The implementation of this treaty will have a substantive impact on strengthening the regime for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and will serve as a real contribution by the Russian Federation and the United States to the implementation of their obligations on nuclear disarmament in accordance with Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

A bilateral commission has been established to implement the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty in accordance with its provisions. Within that framework, an exchange of information is currently taking place regarding compliance by the parties with their obligations and issues considered to be linked to the implementation of the treaty. The first session of the bilateral commission took place in Geneva in April 2004, and the second session was last week.

Issues on strengthening strategic stability in a broader context are also the subject of dialogue within the framework of the working groups established under the aegis of the Russian-American advisory group on issues of strategic security. In addition, by the end of 2009, the Start I Treaty will still be in force, with its broad and intensive verification mechanism. Moreover, if the two parties agree, the treaty can be extended. That means that the strategic offensive potentials of Russia and the United States will not only be the subject of regular consideration in the bilateral working bodies created for that purpose, but will also, for a long time to come, be subject to the dual and mutually complementary restrictions of those treaties.

We must note here that the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty makes it possible to reduce strategic nuclear forces to a level of minimal sufficiency without threatening Russia's national security. The President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Putin, has declared on several occasions the Russian Federation's readiness to irreversibly reduce the Russian nuclear potential to levels even lower than those provided for by the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty.

The Russian Federation, in accordance with the obligations it has undertaken, has continued to take

consistent steps for further reduction of its strategic offensive weapons in order to eliminate excess fissile material resulting from the dismantling of weapons that are no longer necessary for national security. We inform the international community, on a regular basis and in detail, of the specific results of this scrupulously conducted, technically complex and very costly work. In particular, the Russian Federation has submitted detailed information on this issue to the recent third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 NPT Review Conference. A summary of the data on the volume of reductions of strategic offensive weapons is included in the draft resolution we are submitting.

Since 1991, serious efforts in the sphere of nuclear disarmament have also been carried out on the basis of unilateral presidential initiatives by the two States. For practical purposes, the Russian Federation has implemented unilateral initiatives to reduce non-strategic nuclear weapons, which we have already spoken about in the First Committee earlier this session. The process of destroying nuclear warheads is being carried out in accordance with the technological capacities and the real levels of financing available. Russia is also continuing to consistently implement its treaty obligations to reduce not only nuclear but also conventional weapons and to eliminate chemical weapons stockpiles.

Recent events have reaffirmed the urgency, relevance and great international significance — expressed in the joint declaration — of the joint Russian and United States undertaking to build up bilateral efforts to counteract global threats and challenges to international security in the twenty-first century. Those efforts include fighting the linked threats of international terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems. The practical steps undertaken by Russia and the United States to reduce strategic nuclear weapons will unquestionably serve those objectives.

Naturally, achieving those objectives without broad international support is impossible. Therefore, Russia and the United States reaffirm the importance of compliance with and strengthening of such fundamental multilateral agreements as the NPT and the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. In that context, we would like to recall the elaboration and adoption by the Security Council, with the active participation of Russia and the United States, of

resolution 1540 (2004), which laid a solid foundation for countering the black market in WMD. We would like to underscore once again that the task of counteracting the spread of WMD and the war on terrorism must be prosecuted in strict compliance with the norms of international law, taking into account the legitimate security interests and social and economic development of all States.

We would like to express our gratitude to all States participating in the work of the First Committee that have spoken positively on the bilateral efforts of the United States and Russia to reduce strategic nuclear arsenals and also to establish and develop new strategic relations between our two States. We call on all delegations to support the draft resolution introduced jointly by Russia and the United States, entitled "Bilateral strategic nuclear arms reductions and the new strategic framework". We hope that, as was the case at the Assembly's fifty-seventh session, the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Cynkin (United States of America): This year the United States and the Russian Federation are introducing together a draft resolution on "Bilateral strategic nuclear arms reductions and the new strategic framework". I, too, would like to make a few points about our draft resolution.

The draft resolution follows up on a consensus resolution that our two countries tabled at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly. Several elements of this year's text developed themes laid down in its predecessor, but we have tried to avoid a rote repetition of points that have been made before.

The nuclear-weapon States bear a particular responsibility under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to pursue effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament. In the draft resolutions on our bilateral nuclear reduction activities, our two countries try to make clear to the world community that progress is being made in this important area.

The present draft resolution welcomes the entry into force of the Moscow Treaty and describes the results of continuing efforts by the United States and Russia to reduce strategic nuclear warheads through its implementation. Some of the material in the draft resolution regarding eliminations carried out by the United States has not been previously publicized. In

addition, the draft resolution recognizes that the United States and the Russian Federation have developed a new strategic relationship and that we continue to pursue cooperative efforts in strategic offensive reductions through meetings of the Moscow Treaty's Bilateral Implementation Commission, as well as in working groups established under the Consultative Group for Strategic Security.

Because forced reductions are not the only element in our ongoing efforts to carry out our NPT article VI obligations, the draft resolution points out steps being taken to implement bilateral agreements on downblending highly enriched uranium for use as power reactor fuel. It also points to continued efforts under our agreement on the disposition of plutonium designated as no longer required for defence purposes.

The United States believes that the draft resolution presents a picture of steady progress in this highly important area, based on the firm commitment by both countries to continue their cooperation. We hope that our draft resolution will once again be adopted by consensus.

The Chairman (spoke in Spanish): We will now begin the conventional arms segment of our discussion. However, before I call on the first speaker on that theme, I would like to recall that I have proposed that we make available enough time and space for Ambassador Thalmann to conduct informal consultations. I therefore intend to adjourn the formal part of this meeting around 11 a.m. Introduction of resolutions in the conventional weapons cluster and the informal dialogue will come tomorrow.

Mr. Elisala (Samoa): As current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum group, I am making this statement on behalf of Australia, Fiji, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country, Samoa.

The problem of the illicit availability and use of small arms is very real for the communities and countries of the Pacific islands region. Although the number of small arms in circulation in Pacific island countries is small, in comparison to some other regions, the potential for their misuse to cause humanitarian, social and economic harm and even to destabilize Governments is great. In our region the illicit possession and unlawful use of such weapons has

exacerbated law and order problems and internal conflicts, undermining good governance and development.

For those reasons, the members of the Pacific Islands Forum have worked assiduously to develop and implement a common regional approach to reduce the trade in small arms. The most recent example of that coordinated approach and of our common commitment to addressing small arms concerns was a regional workshop sponsored by the Governments of Japan and Australia and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, which was held in Fiji in August 2004. Pacific Islands Forum members wish to thank the Japanese Government and the Regional Centre for their generous support for that initiative.

In consolidating the outcomes of previous regional workshops, the 2004 workshop was an invaluable forum for sharing experiences on the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms. It also served to advance the consideration of a model Weapons Control Bill that has been endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum leaders as a basis for enacting and improving relevant legislation in national jurisdictions. Identifying and fixing legislative gaps through information-sharing and common efforts is a key strategy in our approach to better controlling small arms.

Participants in the Fiji workshop agreed on a number of practical initiatives. First is to identify national assistance needs, including any legislative and technical assistance requirements. To this end, the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat will develop a matrix of technical assistance and capacity-building requirements to help match specific needs to possible resources.

A second initiative is to use national reporting under the United Nations Programme of Action as a tool for developing a more reliable knowledge base on quantities, sources and uses of small arms and on gaps in the implementation of controls. In particular, such reporting provides a mechanism for information-sharing and feedback, helping us to customize the model Weapons Control Bill to suit respective institutional and legislative requirements.

A third initiative is to take advantage of assistance provided by United Nations Development Programme to fulfil United Nations reporting requirements. Fourthly, we will explore ways to further

improve small arms security in the Pacific, including the development of follow-up training and stockpile management programmes to build on recent progress made in improving the physical security of defence force armories in the region.

Pacific Islands Forum members intend to report outcomes of these efforts to the Forum's next annual leaders' summit, in 2005, to the 2005 United Nations small arms Biennial Meeting and to the 2006 United Nations small arms Review Conference. The latter two meetings will be important to consolidate the international community's ongoing efforts to build an institutional framework capable of addressing the small arms threat in a holistic manner.

Through practical initiatives like the recent Fiji workshop, Pacific island countries will continue to adopt a coordinated regional approach toward addressing the small arms threat. In this context, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was mandated under the Forum leaders' 2000 "Biketawa Declaration", which states that assistance will be provided to a member upon request "on the basis of all Forum members being part of the Pacific islands extended family". The Mission has had good results in its first year, not least because of the extensive participation of a large number of Pacific Islands Forum countries. Since it began in July 2003, RAMSI has overseen the passage of relevant legislation and the surrender or confiscation of 3,700 illegal firearms, thus helping to restore stability and law and order, consolidating Government finances and laying the groundwork for long-term governance reform. RAMSI stands as a cooperative example of a region's practical response to small arms and related threats.

Similarly, there has been continued rapid progress in weapons disposal efforts in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. As noted in the Secretary-General's recent report to the Security Council of 29 September 2004 (S/2004/771), 1,841 weapons, or approximately 92.6 per cent of the total collected, have now been destroyed. This steady progress in weapons disposal, in addition to the recruitment and training of additional police, has contributed to improved law and order and stability throughout the province.

Despite the achievements and progress that Pacific Islands Forum countries have made, we are not immune — and in many ways are highly vulnerable —

to the destabilizing presence and proliferation of small arms and to targeting by unscrupulous arms traders and other opportunists. We are determined to continue to address those threats and challenges through concerted regional action.

Mr. Lezama (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is particularly gratified to participate in this thematic debate of our Committee, which during this session has introduced an innovation by subdividing its work into three parts: statements by delegations, statements of experts — the informal part — and the introduction of draft resolutions. Although this arrangement is still in its first, experimental stage, my delegation would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on the initiative you have launched and which we keenly hope will open up the way to frank, exciting and open dialogue. We also hope it will rightly lead us towards the improvement we wish to see in the effectiveness of our Committee's methods of work and, therefore, to the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

The illicit trade in small arms in all its aspects, and assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them are the items on which I wish to take the floor. Those two items are linked, especially in the context of the Central African subregion, where most countries have been particularly swept into the spiral of deadly armed conflicts.

The multiple evils spawned by the situation, which we continue to see — such as the circulation and illegal trade in small arms and light weapons, the unregulated movements of armed groups, mass displacement of refugees, growing crime and insecurity, restriction on the free circulation of people in certain areas because of anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance — are real obstacles to peace, stability and the development of the subregion and, through a boomerang effect, that of the African continent.

Today, it is estimated that there are some 42,000 light weapons in circulation in my country, and more than 40,000 ex-combatants need assistance in being reintegrated. Given the seriousness of the situation, the Government of the Congo is determined to meet the challenge and has spared no efforts in negotiating with the European Union, United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank for the financing

necessary to implement the national programme for the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants.

So, too, the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects is one of our major concerns. The Congolese Government intends to rely on technical and financial support that can be provided by the international community to strengthen cooperation among its bodies, international organizations and organizations and associations of civil society in order to combat trafficking in light weapons and to effectively apply the Programme of Action. That is why, as in previous years, my country has joined others as a sponsor of draft resolutions A/C.1/59/L.43 and A/C.1/59/L.21, entitled, respectively, "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects" and "Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them".

Mr. Rowe (Sierra Leone): My delegation did not participate in the general debate or in yesterday's thematic discussion on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. However, we share the concern of others that these weapons pose the greatest threat to mankind and, more importantly, that something must be done not only to stop their proliferation and to prohibit their use, but also to eliminate them from the face of the earth.

Today, the focus of the thematic discussion is not just on the threat but also on the reality of the spread and use of so-called conventional weapons. I say so-called because, as we know from our bitter experience in Sierra Leone, these weapons cause massive destruction, especially in internal conflicts. Therefore, we have every reason to suggest that perhaps next year, in our thematic debate, all of what we now place under the rubric of "conventional weapons" should be considered under the cluster of "other weapons of mass destruction".

I would like to touch briefly on three categories of these other weapons, or conventional weapons: first, anti-personnel mines; secondly, certain weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects; and thirdly, small arms and light weapons. I will consider each of them from the perspective of universality and compliance. The Ambassador of the United Kingdom yesterday spoke, I think, about the realities of contemporary challenges. If I understand him correctly, I believe he was saying

that, since we are face common concerns and challenges, we should take a serious look at the implementation of our commitments.

My delegation shares that view, but would like to add that there is a direct relationship between compliance with, and the universality of, arms control and disarmament instruments. In other words, while we emphasize the obligation to comply, we must also urge others who are outside these regimes and which have not done so to make a commitment by becoming parties to the respective instruments. Universality and compliance must go hand in hand.

Last year, my delegation told the Committee that Sierra Leone, consistent with the principle of universality, was a party to the Ottawa mine-ban Convention. We also expressed our commitment to the full and effective implementation and compliance with the provisions of the treaty. As promised, and notwithstanding our limited capacity, Sierra Leone forwarded its initial article 7 compliance report to the Secretary-General earlier this year.

We also reported that we had recently destroyed our entire stockpile of anti-personnel landmines — all 959 pieces. Not much, comparatively speaking. But considering the humanitarian consequences of the deliberate use of, or accidental contact with, say, 20 of those pieces, we can say that, in destroying its stockpile, Sierra Leone has made a significant contribution to the objective of a mine-free world.

Sierra Leone has promoted the universalization and implementation of the Convention, and appropriate enabling legislation, in compliance with the Convention, is under consideration. Of course, we look forward to the First Review Conference in Nairobi, which we consider an important step towards achieving the objective of a mine-free world.

Turning now to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), we assured the Committee last year that we remain committed to our policy of contributing, as far as possible, to the universality of all multilateral disarmament and arms control regimes, including those that are closely linked with international humanitarian law. We mentioned our concern about the dangers posed by the existence and presence of unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war in populated areas in post-conflict Sierra Leone. In fact, a few weeks ago, our military

successfully detonated unexploded bombs about 50 kilometres from the capital, Freetown.

In order to strengthen the CCW, last month Sierra Leone deposited its instrument of ratification and acceptance of the relevant provisions of the Convention pertaining to the four Protocols and their relevant amendments.

The third aspect of conventional weapons I would like to address is the illicit trade and transfer of small arms and light weapons. Granted that the Programme of Action adopted by the 2001 United Nations Conference is not legally binding, and granted that the submission of implementation reports to the biennial meetings is voluntary, in the view of my delegation, it is politically and morally binding on all States Members of the Organization. We say morally because of the humanitarian dimension of the problem. In reminding us of the linkage between the scourge of the illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons and the norms of international humanitarian law, the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) last week rightly pointed out that the obligation of States under international humanitarian law should be converted into intensified implementation of all aspects of the 2001 Programme of Action. My delegation shares that view.

I think that the exclamation mark in the ICRC statement, in our view, was the assertion that

"all of these weapons originate in States parties to the Geneva Convention and fall into the hands of those who violate those norms through inadequate controls on their transfer." (see A/C.1/59/PV.6)

By participating actively in its drafting and adoption, Sierra Leone is, in a sense, a party to the Programme of Action. Its limited capacity for implementation notwithstanding, Sierra Leone is making every effort to implement the relevant provisions of the document. We are already trying to review and strengthen our national implementation mechanism for the preparation of our report to the 2005 Biennial Conference.

As one of the first countries to endorse the three-year extension of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa, Sierra Leone is endorsing a further extension of this important

regional initiative. We also support efforts to transform the Moratorium into a legally binding instrument.

As a victim of the devastating and destructive consequences of the illicit transfer and use of small arms and light weapons, Sierra Leone is of the view that the principle of the rule of law must be injected into all aspects of this phenomenon, from manufacture to brokering, and from transfer and re-transfer to tracing and use. That is why we support the drafting and adoption of relevant international and legally binding instruments for as many aspects of the problem as possible. It is no surprise that we would like to see an international legally binding and transparent instrument on the tracing and marking of these deadly so-called small weapons — weapons that have caused such massive destruction of life and property in countries such as Sierra Leone.

The illicit transfer and indiscriminate use of conventional weapons, especially those that are euphemistically referred to as "small and light" are not merely threats to international peace and security. They are, in reality, and on a daily basis, eroding human security. For evidence of this reality, we have only to review current and imminent United Nations peacekeeping operations, in Africa, for example.

Mr. Youssouf (Mali) (*spoke in French*): Since I am taking the floor for the first time, I would like first of all, on behalf of my delegation, to congratulate you, Sir — and, through you, the other members of the Bureau — on your well-deserved election to preside over the work of the Committee. Your personal experience and the skill you have shown in guiding our debates since the outset of our work are clear guarantees of the success of our deliberations. I would like to assure you of the support and cooperation of my delegation in the discharge of your mandate.

The objective of our Committee's work is to meet major challenges in the field of arms control and disarmament. The importance that the international community attaches to that question was noted by many delegations during the general debate.

My delegation understands and shares the concerns voiced regarding nuclear disarmament, weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons, and the risk of their acquisition by terrorists. Here I would like to assure the Committee of the readiness of the Republic of Mali to contribute to collective disarmament efforts. However, such actions

must take place in the context of a multilateral framework.

The major concern of my country, my subregion and Africa regarding disarmament is the problem of small arms and light weapons. For our continent, weapons of that type represent a genuine challenge to peace, the stability of our States and to security and the development of our peoples.

Since the end of the Cold War and of strategic competition, possession of weapons is no longer the monopoly of States, because of the spread of conflicts in certain regions of the world, including Africa. Ethnic and religious groups, economic interests and militias now are clashing within sovereign entities.

During the 1990s, in certain parts of Africa, States lost exclusive control over arms. That situation opened the way to large-scale banditry, with armed attacks, carjackings, killings and injuries, and rape during armed conflict. Statistics reveal that from 150 million to 500 million small arms and light weapons are in circulation today in the world, beyond all control by States.

It is the magnitude of the situation that in 1993 prompted the President of the Republic of Mali to request the support of the Secretary-General in combating this phenomenon in Mali and in the West African subregion. The positive results we have seen in our country since then demonstrate the importance of the large-scale efforts to achieve that objective. Those substantive results are the fruit of the political will of States to engage in a ruthless struggle against the spread of small arms. The moratorium on the importing, exporting and manufacture of small arms and light weapons in West Africa is an outstanding illustration of that. Here I would like to pay tribute to the commitment of the member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). I also wish to welcome the significant progress now being made in work on an international instrument on marking and tracing light weapons.

My country, which has always been in the avant-garde of that struggle in West Africa, today has a wealth of experience. The Republic of Mali endured an armed rebellion during the 1990s in the southern region, and in 1996 it established a national commission to combat the spread of light weapons. Between 2001 and 2003 that body collected and burned, during ceremonies called the Flame of Peace

held throughout the country, approximately 850 weapons. From this rostrum, I would like to thank the Belgian Government for its considerable support for the work of that commission.

In conclusion, I would like to draw the attention of all delegations to draft resolution A/C.1/59/L.21, entitled, "Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them", which my country has submitted for adoption by our Committee on behalf of the 15 member States of ECOWAS. I would like, in advance, to thank all of the delegations who will be kind enough to support the resolution. We hope that, as in the past, it will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Sanders (Netherlands): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons remains a world-wide scourge. Small arms cause some 10,000 casualties per week. It is an issue all of our countries are confronted with. The easy access to those weapons exacerbates conflicts, facilitates violent crime and terrorism, impedes post-conflict reconstruction and undermines long-term sustainable development.

Factors affecting demand are especially relevant to addressing the illicit trade in and acquisition of small arms and light weapons. Small arms control must be aided by a reduction in small arms demand, and such reduction is closely linked to good governance and confidence in public institutions.

The member States of the European Union would like to stress the importance of early and full implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. That is why the EU is looking forward to a substantial and forward-looking Biennial Meeting of States Parties, to be held in 2005, which will be the last biennial meeting before the next United Nations

Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons, in 2006.

The EU is very active in the fields covered by the Programme of Action. Apart from substantial national programmes of member countries, the EU provides approximately €52 million to small arms and light weapons programmes in Cambodia, South-Eastern Europe and Latin America, as well as to small arms destruction and disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation operations in Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The EU welcomes and strongly supports the work of the Open-ended Working Group to Negotiate an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace in a Timely and Reliable Manner Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, and of its Chairman, Ambassador Thalmann. The EU is looking forward to the informal consultations on this matter and will contribute actively to their success. The EU is of the opinion that the Working Group should work towards a legally binding instrument. The EU would favour the inclusion of ammunition for small arms and light weapons and of related explosives within the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group and in the aforementioned international instrument. It is important that the right to initiate tracing requests not be unnecessarily limited.

The EU is also of the opinion that there is no need to create a new international body for cooperation in tracing. Existing networks should be used. However, it is important to establish national focal points to facilitate a fast and efficient flow of information and tracing requests. The EU reiterates its support for the successful conclusion of those negotiations, aimed at the adoption of a legally binding international instrument to enable States to trace small arms and light weapons in a timely and reliable manner.

To a considerable extent, the small arms issue is a problem of transfers. The EU supports the current broad-based regional processes aimed at building support for the development of transfer controls and for promoting the inclusion in the United Nations Programme of Action of minimum common international controls on small arms and light weapons transfers. Progress on those issues would be a significant step in reducing the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons.

The EU also welcomes the broad-based consultations held by the Secretary-General on further steps to enhance international cooperation in preventing, combating and eradicating illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons and the report of the Secretary-General on the outcome of those consultations (A/59/181).

In 2003 the Council of the European Union adopted a common position, requiring that each member State introduce national legislation in order to effectively control brokering activities. The EU is convinced that the establishment of national legislation and regionally accepted rules and practices on brokering activities is essential and urgent. At the same time the EU stresses that in addition, a global, multilateral approach to the problem of illicit brokering is necessary. That is supported by the outcome of the broad-based consultations organized by the Department for Disarmament Affairs. An open-ended working group on illicit brokering would not interfere with the progress of the Open-ended Working Group on Identifying and Tracing.

Evaluation and verification of end-user certificates is part of the complex licensing process. Verification of the recipient is of crucial importance. Therefore, the EU encourages Member States to support consultations on effective end-user certificate systems at regional and subregional levels, conscious that evaluation and verification of both end-user and end-use are important in minimizing the risks of diversion of the exported goods and that any investigation, prior to approval, should involve all the available information.

In the context of arms transparency, the EU welcomes the decision to lower the reporting threshold of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms for large-calibre artillery systems. That will enhance the Register's relevance to a number of subregions around the world, particularly in Africa. Interested Member States, if they wish to do so, can now also include transfers of small arms and light weapons in their annual report to the Register, using definitions and reporting methods they deem appropriate, and as part of additional background information.

Worldwide, there are an estimated 100,000 man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) in circulation today, of which thousands are thought to be on offer on the black market and many of which are presumed to be in the possession of terrorists and other

non-State actors. MANPADS are extremely lethal, easily concealable and inexpensive. Not only are they being used by insurgents for guerrilla purposes, in recent years MANPADS have increasingly become a terrorist tool for threatening civil aviation. That development warrants worldwide attention and immediate action.

In this connection, the EU also welcomes the decision to include MANPADS within the scope of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. As the Secretary-General noted, "This would contribute to broad-based international efforts to stem illicit transfers, particularly in preventing these short-range ground-to-air systems from falling into the hands of terrorists." (A/58/274, p. 5)

Those broader efforts, in various multilateral forums, focus in particular on export controls. They were initially prescribed by the Wassenaar Arrangement, but the political commitment by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to extend export controls to the entire OSCE area and the Group of Eight (G-8) initiative to internationalize those controls as the gold standard for controls on MANPADS are all supported firmly by the European Union.

The First Review Conference of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention will take place later this year in Nairobi. The Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World — as this important event has become known — provides us with an opportunity to assess the enormous progress that has been achieved so far: 143 States have adhered to the Convention; the number of States officially trading in anti-personnel landmines has fallen from 34 to zero; and the number of States where such mines are used has dropped from 19 in 1997 to no more than five today. More than 37 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed, and large areas of mined land have been cleared. Most importantly, the number of new victims of landmines — killed or injured — has dropped significantly.

But at the same time, the Nairobi Summit provides us with an opportunity to chart a course for the solution of the landmine problem in the coming years. Important challenges remain. Promoting and achieving universal adherence to the Mine Ban Convention remains a priority, as vast stocks of anti-personnel mines are still kept by States outside of the Convention. The EU has carried out numerous

démarches to promote the widest adherence to the principles of the Convention and urges States not party to accede to the Convention. Landmines still kill or injure thousands of innocent people each year and remain a formidable obstacle to development. It will be a significant challenge in the next five years to ensure the financial resources necessary to fulfil the mine clearance obligations within the timelines of the Convention.

In order to reduce the number of mine accident victims, to help victims and to foster socio-economic development, the European Union is providing assistance to affected States and communities. The combined effort of the EU and its member States make the Union the biggest contributor to mine action worldwide. Mine action is characterized by close cooperation between Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and local communities. The EU urges all States in a position to do so to continue or to join this cooperation.

The EU will participate actively and at the highest possible level in the Nairobi Summit and encourages all States to do the same in order to send a clear signal that the landmine problem is finite and can indeed be solved.

Last year the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) saw the adoption of a fifth protocol, on explosive remnants of war. It was a success of process and of substance: of process, since it was the first time in a number of years that we concluded a legally binding instrument in the field of arms control; and of substance, since it is our belief that this protocol will significantly reduce the humanitarian risk to civilian populations.

The EU attaches great importance to the entry into force of the Protocol, which several EU member States have already ratified. The Union calls upon all CCW States to make efforts for early ratification, and it stands ready to further contribute constructively to considerations and developments on the application of existing principles of international humanitarian law in the context of explosive remnants of war and on possible preventive measures.

The EU also considers it crucial that the serious humanitarian, developmental and economic concerns posed by the irresponsible use of mines other than anti-personnel mines — MOTAPMs — be addressed. Reliable reports from humanitarian organizations and non-

governmental organizations working in conflict zones, as well as from States, highlight those concerns. We have seen a growing awareness of the urgency to address those humanitarian problems. At the same time, we acknowledge that MOTAPMs can still be used as legitimate weapons that serve important military purposes with regard to self-defence and other military operations.

It is important to strike a balance between humanitarian concerns and military considerations. The EU would like to draw attention to the proposal on MOTAPMs sponsored by more than 30 States parties to the CCW, including a number of EU partners. EU countries have also made important contributions to the process on subjects such as sensitive fuses, detectability and the problems of mines that are laid outside fenced and marked areas. The EU very much welcomes the efforts undertaken by the coordinator with a view to facilitate the discussion and allow progress on that issue.

The EU is actively promoting the establishment of a compliance mechanism applicable to the entire

CCW. Simplicity, clarity and cost-effectiveness should be guiding principles of any such consultation and compliance mechanism. It should not unduly burden States parties, and it should be consistent with existing meeting and reporting procedures. The EU is actively reflecting on modalities for an effective mechanism. We encourage other States parties to reflect likewise and to take a flexible position as well.

The Chairman (spoke in Spanish): Mindful of the fact that our speakers list includes, thus far, seven more delegations, let me suggest that those delegations might speak at our next meeting.

I now intend to adjourn the formal part of this meeting so that Ambassador Anton Thalmann, the Chairman of the Open-ended Working Group to Negotiate an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace in a Timely and Reliable Manner Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, can hold informal discussions.

The meeting rose at 11.07 a.m.